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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAMA 001277

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SUBJECT: FRACTIOUS IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION VISITS
BAHRAIN

REF: MANAMA 1213

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.4 (B)(D)

11. (C) Summary. A diverse group of Iraq parliamentarians, led by Speaker Mashadani, visited Bahrain July 9-11, meeting with a range of officials, parliamentarians, and business leaders. Before visiting Bahrain, the delegation stopped in Iran, where they found a confident Iranian leadership that urged the Iraqis to raise Shia issues in Bahrain. Shia delegation members apparently did just that at the Bahraini parliament, angering Bahraini Sunnis. Mashadani, meanwhile, actively engaged the press, using some harsh anti-American rhetoric. In a discussion with the Ambassador, in contrast, he was full of praise for Ambassador Khalilzad and General Casey, clearly valuing the American presence in Iraq. He urged Bahraini business leaders to come to Iraq, but the President of Bahrain's Chamber of Commerce and Industry said Bahrainis would be hesitant until the security situation improves. This fractious group, which showed little cohesion as a delegation, gave Bahrainis a good snapshot of the new Iraq --both the divisions troubling the country and the new phenomenon of Sunnis, Shia and Kurds all speaking their minds freely. End summary.

12. (C) Speaker of the Iraqi Council of Representatives Mahmoud Mashadani led a diverse group of Iraqi parliamentarians on a visit to Bahrain July 9-11 at the invitation of Bahrain's Shura Council. The group met with Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid bin Ahmed Al-Khalifa, Parliamentary leaders from the Shura and Council of Representatives, the President of the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and groups from the Sunni and Shia community. The delegation was comprised of a wide range of Iraqis, including Sunnis, Shia, Kurds, and Turkomens, a diversity that proved a bit unwieldy for the small Iraqi Embassy as it attempted to support the visit. As the Iraqi Ambassador commented to us, "It was not a homogenous group."

13. (C) Foreign Minister Shaikh Khalid, in a conversation with the Ambassador, described his meeting with the group as constructive, although the Iraqis "clearly came with no agenda" and were not a cohesive delegation. Nobody seemed to care what Speaker Mashadani said, and everyone wanted to speak for themselves. As soon as the meeting started, he added, mobile phones started ringing and people stopped paying attention. "I had a chance to see first-hand the new Iraq," Shaikh Khalid quipped.

14. (C) Before visiting Bahrain, the group stopped in Tehran. According to Mashadani's newly-appointed security affairs advisor, the group found the Iranians arrogant and full of confidence. They argued that Iraq should kick the Americans out of Iraq. When Mashadani responded that Iraq's security forces were not yet strong enough to do that, they responded that Iran would be happy to supply the Iraqi government with

whatever it needed in terms of money and arms to maintain security. On Bahrain, the Iranian interlocutors reportedly urged the Iraqis to press the Bahrainis on the question of treatment of Shia in Bahrain. The Shia members of the Iraqi delegation apparently did just that during a meeting at the Council of Representatives, angering Bahraini Sunni parliamentarians and drawing a rebuke from speaker Mashadani. This annoyed the Iraqi Shia delegation members, who then demanded that the delegation leave Bahrain a day early (which they did, only to have their plane diverted to Amman because of a sandstorm in Iraq).

15. (U) In the meeting at the Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI), Mashadani, according to press reports, urged Bahrain business representatives to visit Iraq to explore trade and investment opportunities. He said that there were numerous opportunities, and that the Iraqi government and parliament would support any initiative by Bahraini companies. BCCI President Esam Fakhro told the press that the Bahrain private sector is interested in exploring business opportunities in Iraq, but that Bahrainis will be hesitant until the security situation improves. When the security situation does improve, he stated, the BCCI can start organizing trade delegations to visit Iraq.

16. (U) On arrival in Bahrain, Mashadani gave a full-page interview with the Arabic daily "Al-Watan" which, if quoted correctly, included some strong anti-American rhetoric. He reportedly said that the occupation forces had left the country in a miserable situation, and that "our clash is with the Americans, and not the Shia or Kurds." He described former CPA head Bremer as a thief who stole Iraq, consulted with Israel, and sought to break up the Iraqi army and security institutions. In a separate interview, he

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reportedly accused the United States of taking control of Iraq's oil and "stealing it and distributing it as it desires."

17. (C) During a dinner hosted by the Iraqi Ambassador for the delegation, the Ambassador expressed to Mashadani his concern about the anti-American rhetoric in the press interview. Mashadani brushed off the Ambassador's concerns, saying that he had the highest praise for Ambassador Khalilzad and for General Casey and didn't want the Americans -- and especially Ambassador Khalilzad -- to leave. He also talked proudly of having met President Bush. He sat next to the Ambassador at the dinner, and could not have been more friendly. Mashadani's national security advisor, in trying to explain the press rhetoric, said that Mashadani is under tremendous pressure, caught between the large number of Shia in Parliament on the one hand and the Sunni extremists outside of Parliament on the other. When he speaks, he must be attentive to different audiences.

18. (C) Comment. We have been urging the Bahraini government to invite Iraqi leaders to come to Bahrain to increase engagement and expose Bahrainis to the new Iraq. This delegation certainly did that. Although in some ways the delegation only served to further solidify concerns -- almost everyone could find something to be alarmed about, from the Shia delegation members bringing up local Shia issues to Mashadani enunciating a strong Sunni line -- the fact is that Bahrainis saw an Iraq they would have never seen before, with Sunnis, Shia, and Kurds all freely speaking their mind.

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